

**Amendments to the Specification:**

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 9, line 5 and ending on page 9, line 12 with the following paragraph:

After chlorine treatment the porous pre-form is consolidated into a glass body by applying heat. In one embodiment, the pre-form is heated to approximately 1650 °C for about ten minutes. The porous pre-form can also be consolidated by sintering using a high temperature electrically heated furnace. The sintering of glass particles is achieved via viscous flow, and is therefore time and temperature dependent. The sintering temperature is preferably above 1000°C, more preferably can be between 1000 °C and 1600 °C. One example of a sintering schedule includes heating at a rate of 5 °C /min until the temperature reaches approximately 1400°C, more preferably until the temperature reaches between 1400-1450 °C, and most preferably until the temperature reaches approximately 1500°C, followed by a more rapid cooling rate of 20 °C /min to the annealing temperature.

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 10, line 28 and ending on page 10, line 32 with the following paragraph:

It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifications and variations can be made to the present invention without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. For example, the present invention may be used with other casting techniques as are well known in the art, such as, for example, slip casting, vacuum casting and gel casting. Thus, it is intended that the present invention cover the modifications and variations of this invention provided they come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.